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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SANAA 001577

SIPDIS

FOR A/S CRANER FROM AMBASSADOR HULL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/01/2013

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [YM](#) [HUMAN RIGHTS](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR AND MINISTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS: LET'S WORK TOGETHER

Classified By: Ambassador Edmund J. Hull for Reasons 1.5 (b,d)

1. Summary: The Ambassador called on the newly-appointed Minister of Human Rights Amat al-Alim al-Suswa on June 30. In a cordial meeting, they discussed the state of human rights in Yemen, the 2002 Human Rights Report, developments in the new Ministry and specific human rights issues, including women, prisons, security forces and the media. They also explored areas of closer cooperation, including increasing potential USG assistance such as community policing and media training. The Ambassador offered to see if A/S Craner might be available to meet with al-Suswa during her planned visit to Washington for Yemen Days September 5-6 (see paragraph 12). Acting Pol/Econ Chief and A/PAO also attended. See biographic note in paragraph 11. End Summary.

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General Environment for Human Rights;  
New Ministry of Human Rights  
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2. (U) The Ambassador and Minister agreed that human rights remains a difficult issue in Yemen that must be addressed on all fronts. At the same time, they agreed that, unlike in some other Middle Eastern countries, the environment of openness and a higher level of freedom in Yemen offers opportunities to make great progress in improving human rights. The Minister said there is great willingness to admit to problems, but often the capacity to address them was hindered by economic, social and sometimes bureaucratic constraints.

3. (U) In the government formed in May 2003, the previous structure of a Minister of State for Human Rights coordinating the work of an inter-agency committee was improved to the status of a full Ministry of Human Rights. The Minister said she has a lot of work to do and asked for patience while she works to improve the capacity of the new ministry to undertake work, particularly in the areas of staff development and addressing specific complaints.

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Human Rights Report (HRR)  
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4. (U) The Ambassador encouraged the Minister to increase the dialogue between the Embassy and the Ministry on human rights in general and the HRR specifically. He urged the Minister to work with other ministries to bring old cases to resolution. The Minister agreed, citing the issue of the disappeared from the 1986 and 1994 conflicts. She said the families of the disappeared had come to informal agreement with the ROYG to resolve the issue, but that it should be resolved in an official manner.

5. (U) The Minister indicated that the ROYG felt that the HRR was "important input" in improving their human rights situation. The ROYG plans to issue an official government response to the 2002 HRR as it did in 2001, which would be published and discussed widely. She said the inter-agency process was ongoing to formulate the response. The Ambassador said the 2001 response was appreciated for its evidence of Yemen taking the HRR seriously and that it was taken into account as the 2002 HRR was drafted. He added that dialogue on the report should be continual and frequent as well.

6. (U) The Minister said that the ROYG was planning to develop a report on the U.S. treatment of Yemenis and Yemeni-Americans, citing ill-treatment in the aftermath of 9/11 including Guantanamo detainees and arrests in the U.S. The Ambassador said the U.S. has a sincere desire to protect people's rights and that we should continue to discuss the issue.

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Issues: Women, Prisons, Security Services, Media  
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7. (U) The Ambassador brought up the status of women as one of the key concerns about human rights in Yemen. The Minister agreed, noting it as one of her main interests. She said it is a "huge, complex and difficult" issue because of

Yemeni traditional society. She noted that the ROYG cabinet plans to endorse a Strategy for Women. She used the horrible treatment of women in prisons as an example of the extreme situation. She said that while progress has been made on their conditions with the change to more female guards and higher political attention, the societal view that leaves a stigma where families refuse to take back women prisoners remains a huge hurdle.

18. (U) The Ambassador noted improvements in the treatment of citizens by security services while stressing that much more needs to be done. The Minister agreed that the ignorance by which some police and security services treat citizens needs to be comprehensively addressed. The Ambassador described the concept of community policing in the United States and said it might be one way to address the issue. He offered to work with the Minister and the Minister of the Interior to explore such programs that could possibly be assisted by the USG.

19. (U) As a former journalist, the Minister agreed with the Ambassador that the media situation could be improved. While much press freedom is allowed, journalists still often censor themselves for fear of government reprisal. They agreed that journalists need to be more professional as well, and the Ambassador offered potential USG assistance in this regard via training and visitor programs.

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Comment  
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10. (C) The previous Minister of State for Human Rights, Waheeba Fara'a, offered promise when she was appointed the first woman ROYG minister, but that promise was never realized to full potential. This new appointment of a dynamic and energetic Minister, who appears to intend to accomplish concrete progress rather than rhetoric and who is well-regarded by internationals and ROYG officials alike, offers greater promise for Yemen to improve its human rights record. The Embassy intends to explore concrete ways to assist in addition to ongoing programs, including improving community policing and training the media. End Comment.

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Biographic Note  
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11. (U) Amat al-Alim al-Suswa, Minister of Human Rights:

-- Born in 1958, Taiz  
-- Masters in International Media, American University, Washington, D.C. (USAID scholarship)  
-- Chairwoman of the Yemeni Women's Union, 1989-1990  
-- Assistant Deputy Minister of Information, 1991  
-- Deputy Minister of Information, 1997  
-- Permanent Representative of Yemen to the Chemical Weapons Prohibition Council in the Hague  
-- Ambassador of Yemen to Holland, 2000-2003 (particularly significant as Holland was Yemen's most important economic assistance donor during this period)

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Recommendation  
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12. (U) Post highly recommends that A/S Craner consider meeting with the Minister of Human Rights in September. Post will assist the Minister in coordinating her visit and will provide additional information septel.  
HULL